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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON GAZA WITHDRAWAL

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, August 16, reports on preparations for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and on efforts to dismantle the Israeli settlements there. Another major story is the postponement of the Iraqi constitution.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Ending the settlements is the end of the legend of Greater Israel"

Daily columnist Tarek Masarweh writes on the back-page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (08/16): The [Israeli] military withdrawal in itself means nothing, because an occupying army can always return after having withdrawn. The important thing is the dismantling of the settlements and moving the settlers to outside of the green line, because this event has to do with putting an end to the aspirations of 'the land of Israel' and 'Greater Israel from Egypt to the Euphrates'. The occupation authority must admit that the military withdrawal and the retreat of settlements marks the end of the story of 'the homeland without borders' and the lie of 'a people without a land for a land without a people'.. We must follow the withdrawal from Gaza and the north of the West Bank with all the courage and determination we can muster, because we are establishing the state of Palestine. Celebrations and shows of force over our people are good for no one. What the world wants us to do now is to build the airport, the port, factories, to establish universities and new cities on the location of the settlements, not the chaos that would only magnify the ugly image that hostile forces portrayed as 'terrorism'."

-- "August 15: a day with events before it and after it"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes in the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (08/16): "It is another day for the Palestinian people, a day that is preceded by rounds of struggle and fighting and that will be followed by chapters of resistance and steadfastness leading to the liberation of the lands and the establishment of the independent state with Jerusalem as the capital. It is a day that will go down in the Palestinian history as being a crossroads. On one hand, Gaza could be the gate to liberation and independence. On the other, Gaza could be the graveyard for the Palestinian dream. The keys to one or the other lie in the hands of the Palestinians themselves. It is up to them to make the experience of the liberation of Gaza an attractive model for the upcoming state of Palestine.. Israel after Gaza will not be the same. Israel is going to become fiercer in its attempts to hold to as much of the West Bank as possible.. The battle in the post-Gaza withdrawal period is going to move to the West Bank."

-- "The withdrawal and its repercussions"

Columnist Hussein Rawashdeh writes in the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (08/16): "All Palestinians have the right to be joyful at the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, but the people of the resistance also have the right to express this joy in their way. The Israeli withdrawal, after all, must be understood within its real context and must be presented to the world as being the result of resistance and steadfastness, and as being a mere step, nothing more and nothing less. As such, the Palestinians do not have to give thanks to Sharon, be it by putting an end to the resistance or by throwing down their weapons. The path to liberation is still a long way away."

HALE